



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND PRIVATISATION



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the paper be received.
2. That PPTA Te Wehengarua continues its implacable opposition to the establishment of new charter schools (or te kura hourua, partnership schools or whatever they may be called), and the conversion of state or state-integrated schools to charter schools.
3. That PPTA Te Wehengarua advocates for increased flexibility to allow for innovative approaches within the state and state-integrated school system.
4. That PPTA Te Wehengarua affirms its support for an adequately funded public education system.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This paper PPTA Te Wehengarua has a long-standing and well-documented history of opposition to charter schools and privatisation of Aotearoa New Zealand's public education system¹. Privatisation comes in many forms – through direct attacks (the selling of public-owned assets) and a more stealthy, indirect creep in the shape of things such as bulk funding and vouchers.
- 1.2. In 2005, a conference paper *Threats to Public Education*² reaffirmed PPTA Te Wehengarua's opposition to the threats to the public education system of the bulk funding of salaries, the privatisation of state schools, the introduction of the competitive school model, and site or individual contracts.
- 1.3. The 2010 PPTA Te Wehengarua annual conference opposed PPPs (public private partnerships) in the “absence of evidence that they provide long-term cost savings...efficiency, or innovation”³. The paper *Private Profiteering or Public Private Partnerships* also noted that the concept of partnership in this case was a misnomer, as it was not the “warm relationship between equals...but an exploitative relationship whereby the public purse is raided by privateers bent on extracting profit”.
- 1.4. Annual Conference in 2013 took a “brave and unequivocal stand” against charter schools, determining not to “do anything to assist charter schools” and the 2015 report *Charter Schools: an update* provided a summary of “the failure of the charter school experiment to provide an improved alternative to the public education system in New Zealand”⁴.
- 1.5. Introduced through a confidence and supply agreement between ACT New Zealand and the National Party following the 2011 general election, the first charter schools opened in 2014 and were never without controversy. From financial mismanagement and fraud to dubious data and falling rolls, the charter school experiment was a failure.
- 1.6. PPTA Te Wehengarua worked hard to defeat charter schools, partly through the well-articulated arguments that our members were able to make in their communities and through a sustained and strong defence by members throughout the country. Alliances formed with political parties were also crucial for the end being ‘written on the wall’. Te Āpiha and Te Huarahi were at the forefront of this opposition, and there was a not insignificant fight especially that which was undertaken in Northland.
- 1.7. With the election of the 2017 Labour Government, charter schools were legislated out of existence, with the majority eventually transitioned into stage-integrated schools after some criticism and pleas from school parents and charter school advocates.

¹ Members who are new to the profession or association may wish to seek out previous conference papers and published information for a broad overview of work in this area.

² *Threats to Public Education* AC 2005

³ *Private profiteering or public private partnerships*, Annual Conference paper, 2010

⁴ *Charter Schools: an update*, Annual Conference report 2015

2. TE KURA HOURUA AND TE TIRITI

- 2.1. Right from the beginning, the name ‘charter school’ was quickly ditched by the government in favour of the more palatable ‘Te Kura Hourua’ or partnership schools⁵. There was considerable support for partnership schools by some iwi who saw it as an opportunity for the transformation of an education system that had failed Māori students.
- 2.2. A treaty claim was made arguing that the Crown “has not stated how forcing Māori back into the state system will help to advance educational outcomes for Māori, rather than perpetuate the inequities currently suffered by Māori in state education.”⁶
- 2.3. The argument that Māori students “carry the weight of decades of institutional baggage”⁷ cannot be dismissed, but rather than serve as an argument for the fragmentation of the public education system, it should be taken as a challenge to improve.
- 2.4. Despite accusations of being in an “ideological bun fight”⁸, PPTA Te Wehengarua and other parties opposed to the introduction of privatisation are committed to seeing the education system do better for all ākonga. PPTA Te Wehengarua consistently introduces policy aimed to do just this.
- 2.5. In 2022 for instance, Annual Conference unanimously passed the paper *Ending Streaming in Aotearoa* which clearly acknowledged the racist history of schooling in this country and provided a roadmap for change; working alongside iwi and other education sector groups is the way to bring about real and sustainable change.
- 2.6. Indeed, Te Pati Māori (who supported the introduction of charter schools in 2014) have shifted their focus towards equitable resourcing for kaupapa Māori education with Māori medium “funded equal to its mainstream equivalents”⁹. Their policy for mainstream education also includes increased resourcing for te reo Māori, Māori history and increased Māori representation on staff (including at senior levels). PPTA Te Wehengarua would support this as policy.

3. IMPENDING DOOM

- 3.1. With political futures in the balance, the next general election may bring another lurch to the right. This would almost certainly bring the spectre of charter schools and privatisation back onto the legislative agenda.

⁵ PPTA Te Wehengarua and the majority of the public continued to call them charter schools.

⁶ www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/105217177/closure-of-partnership-schools-in-breach-of-the-treaty-of-waitangi

⁷ Stoddart-Smith, Carrie. ‘Let’s not sacrifice charter schools for Māori to an ideological war’, The Spinoff, 2018

⁸ Ibid

⁹ [Te Pati Māori Education Policy, 2023](#)

- 3.2. Current (published) National Party education policy does not have any information around charter schools, partnership schools or privatisation and instead focuses the attention around *Teaching the Basics Brilliantly*¹⁰.
- 3.3. Earlier this year, Christopher Luxon stated that he “was supportive of charter schools, but not considering performance pay for teachers”, and that bulk funding was not on the National Party agenda¹¹. However, with the likely requirement of support from ACT New Zealand for National to gain political power, it is likely that ACT’s education policy will be at the forefront of any confidence and supply agreements.
- 3.4. ACT policy would see every student being given a ‘student education account’ of \$12,000 every year from age two until 18; parents will be able to use their ‘education account’ to access any school that will ‘accept their child’s enrolment’¹². The voters will not be fooled, this is merely the unpopular voucher system with a new name.
- 3.5. School enrolment zones will be gone and in their place will be a “vibrant marketplace of educators offering new opportunities for all children”¹³. Any current state school could transition to a ‘partnership school’ and private schools will be open to a larger ‘market share’ than they can currently capture. While not written ACT policy, they have also confirmed to PPTA Te Wehengarua that any former Charter School would be invited to return to that status which (among other things) would have serious implications for our members in these branches.
- 3.6. While current policy does not explicitly state that for-profit organisations will enter our ‘market’, it is not too much of a stretch to assume it could soon happen. This begs the question: at what cost?
- 3.7. What is the cost of a profit motive incentivising performance in ‘measurable ways’? We do not want our children and their education to be commodified. There are key aspects to our education system and the ‘public good’ that do not “lend themselves to a profit/loss approach – [such as] social cohesion, inclusion...[and] wellbeing”¹⁴. It is a very real fear that the ‘flight’ from disadvantaged areas to private or partnership schools by some students will see “greater social and cultural segregation in the school system”¹⁵.
- 3.8. Depriving children of the opportunity to “learn, play and communicate” with other students from different “social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds” absolutely threatens the social cohesion of Aotearoa New Zealand¹⁶. Anecdotally, in looking at the current zoning and enrolment schemes that exist, and the rorts that happen, we know that the ‘creaming off’ of students will occur. We already have these divisions by virtue of socioeconomic divides in our communities – particularly in the urban centres. We want to see less social division in Aotearoa New Zealand, not more.

¹⁰ [National Party Education Policy, 2023](#)

¹¹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/486459/national-party-plans-to-rewrite-school-curriculum-if-elected>

¹² [Guaranteeing them freedom to learn’, ACT New Zealand Education Policy, 2023.](#)

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ [Fiona Millar, “We must now have an open debate about privatisation”](#). The Guardian, 2012.

¹⁵ *School choice and school vouchers: An OECD perspective*, OECD 2017

¹⁶ *ibid*

- 3.9. Internationally, schools who are subject to market forces often fail with one study finding failure rates of 25% after five years and 50% after 15 years; the schools more likely to close are those in areas of high deprivation¹⁷. This creates further instability in the lives of children who are least able to weather such change. These schools are an experiment we do not want to see replicated here.
- 3.10. Australian studies show that there is little evidence to show that independent schools offer any advantage over public schools¹⁸. Further, an analysis of 68 education systems through the PISA tests showed that “attendance at private schools was not consistently related to higher test performance”¹⁹. What does make a difference is the students’ socioeconomic indicators.
- 3.11. Indeed, after accounting for students’ socio-economic status, in 22 education systems, students in public schools “score higher than students in private schools, in eight systems they score lower than students in private schools, and on average across OECD countries, students in public schools score higher than students in private schools”²⁰. Those other factors that we know make a difference to a student’s ability to engage with learning in a meaningful way – housing and food security for instance – will make more of an impact than the status of their schooling.
- 3.12. In the PPTA Te Wehengarua submission to the Picot Report, we explained that our collective agreements were not “simply a form of feather-bedding for teachers but ensured that schools in poor areas had the same capacity to attract and retain staff as those in wealthier areas”²¹.
- 3.13. We also know that charter schools are detrimental to teacher workload and wellbeing. Union membership was almost non-existent, school staff were isolated and unable to fraternise in any way with any PPTA Te Wehengarua members and there were many tales of Health and Safety compliance issues. If there were to be state schools opting to become partnership schools, we would have members trapped and forced to make difficult decisions.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION WITHIN THE SYSTEM

- 4.1. Rather than the unknown, there already exists innovative examples of schooling within the public education system: kura kaupapa Māori created under section 155, and designated special character schools created under Section 156 of the Education Act of 1989.
- 4.2. Special character provisions allow for parents and communities to seek the conversion of operating schools or the establishment of new schools – if they can show a desire and/or a need for doing so. While improvements can be made around how the decision-making power

¹⁷ Burris and Ryan Pflieger, *Broken Promises: An Analysis of Charter School Closures from 1999-2017*,”

¹⁸ Larsen, Sally and Forbes, Alexander. “Going to Private Schools won’t make a different to your kid’s academic scores”, 2022.

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ *School choice and school vouchers: An OECD perspective*

²¹ *PPTA Te Wehengarua Submission on the Picot Report*

is wielded under the current legislation, we would support this as a mechanism to see more innovation introduced.

4.3. What is true for the majority of former charter schools who made the transition, is that they have continued to work well as state-integrated schools. The argument that they can only provide innovative education outside of the 'system' is nonsense.

4.4. Through encouraging the transition to designated special character or creating collaborative school sites, or 'schools within schools', our system has the ability to provide equitable access to education that allows every ākonga to thrive. This includes our neurodiverse learners, those students who are currently referred to 'alternative education' and teen parents.

4.5. Examples of current models that provide innovative education delivery include:

- Western Springs College – Ngā Puna o Waiōrea – Co-Governance

As an immersion kura in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Ngā Puna o Waiōrea operates “collaboratively” on the same site as Western Springs College²², and operates under a co-governance constitution²³ where “school governance and management are based on a commitment to power sharing according to Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities”²⁴. Over 90% of the students attending Ngā Puna o Waiōrea stay at school until the end of Year 13 and their pass rate for NCEA Level 1 is above 85% compared to the national average of 78.2%.

- Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery – Designated Special Character

A special character area school in Christchurch, Ao Tawhiti “offers opportunities for learning beyond the traditional mainstream schooling system. Our students value the choice and flexibility that our style of education provides²⁵. The school has an expectation of “active involvement” by whānau and with learners and whānau working together to design the timetable, this can change from term to term. All students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which works to allow the school to meet the passions, interests and needs of all students. Learning Advisors ‘teach’ courses but there are multiple ways to ‘access the curriculum’. The school caters well for neurodiverse students by fostering passions and allowing for independent and self-directed learning, supported by experienced teachers.

- Kia Aroha College - Designated Special Character

A composite, designated character school in South Auckland, Kia Aroha aims to “provide a learning environment where Māori and Pasifika cultural identities are the norm, including the adherence to Māori and Pasifika cultural customs and bilingual classrooms, and the involvement of extended families in the school's learning community”²⁶. The school has a Māori bilingual unit and Fanau Pasifika which offers bilingual education in Samoan and Tongan languages.

²² <https://waiorea.school.nz/our-story/>

²³ <https://westernsprings.school.nz/board-of-trustees/>

²⁴ <https://westernsprings.school.nz/charter/>

²⁵ <https://aotawhiti.school.nz/>

²⁶ Milne, Ann (2020). "Colouring in the white spaces: The warrior-researchers of Kia Aroha College". Curriculum Perspectives. 40 (1): 87–91.

- Hagley Community College - Designated Special Character
In 2015, Hagley Community College successfully applied to the Ministry of Education for Designated Character status. Hagley “provide students with a significantly different learning environment achieved through delivery models not offered in conventional high school settings”²⁷. The school offers a broad curriculum allowing students across Christchurch to access “a relevant education designed around their individual needs”²⁸. The school accepts adult students and they proudly “provide a space for young people that have had barriers to their education to come with a clean slate and learn”²⁹.

4.6. There are a few more designated character schools in the current system (including most of the former charter schools) but there needs to be some work to ensure that whānau and community, and current state schools, can harness the opportunities as provided in the Act. We would encourage this avenue to be undertaken rather than opening the education system up to privatisation opportunities.

5. THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1. As an organisation we have great experience in resisting terrible ideas. Much has been published of PPTA Te Wehengarua’s implacable opposition to the establishment of new charter schools; and this can be applied to any fight against the conversion of state or state-integrated schools to ‘partnership’ schools. The fight against bulk funding and the eventual defeat of the charter school experiment provides a blueprint for how to continue this stand. Political lobbying, membership education and public information campaigns are all well-sharpened tools in our belt. Recommendation two is essentially business as usual for PPTA Te Wehengarua.
- 5.2. Recommendation three states that PPTA Te Wehengarua advocates for increased flexibility, allowing for innovative approaches within the state and state-integrated school system. We know, for instance, that many of our neurodiverse students are falling through funding and expertise cracks and there are plenty of ways that schools can work to meet their needs, with adequate funding. Whether this be through pastoral programmes or curriculum delivery or the establishment of a school within a school – the flexibility to do so needs to be supported at the ministerial level.
- 5.3. Our constitutional objectives hold that we to advance the cause of education generally and all phases of secondary and technical education in particular. While it is not actually in the constitution, perhaps the missing word (or a silent one) is ‘public’. With recommendation four, this paper reaffirms PPTA Te Wehengarua’s support for an adequately funded public education system.

²⁷ <https://www.hagley.school.nz/about/designated-character-school/>

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*